Ella Matweyou

Professor Melanie Bales

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Thoughts in My Lungs:
An Exploration of the Relationship Between Dance and Yoga

INTRODUCTION

In order to succeed as working professionals and to meet their personal artistic standards, many dancers spend the majority of their careers pushing their bodies to the extreme on a regular basis without sufficient time spent on self care. With so much pressure to excel in various movement disciplines in order to find work, the professional dancer is often forced to sacrifice the state of her body or mind for the sake of the art form. From my personal experience, the aesthetic goal of dancing often supersedes any preventative strategies to manage injury and excess stress. My desire to increase the joy and reduce the pain in my daily dance practice led to the development of my senior distinction project, which explores how my personal yoga practice has shaped my identity as a performer, informed my movement choices, and altered my perceptions of my body. During the process of rehearsing and performing a unique dance solo, I have investigated how dancers can apply the yogic virtue of *ahimsa,* or nonviolence, directly to the dance-making process in order to promote physical and emotional well-being. My solo, entitled "Thoughts in My Lungs," utilizes movement that is simultaneously aesthetically engaging for the audience and non-harmful for the body of the performer.

After completing my yoga teacher training, the preliminary research process for this project, I wanted to apply the knowledge I had gained through yoga to dance training in a practical way. While objective research about yoga is necessary and important, I will leave the

scientific and statistical data to be gathered by qualified individuals in those fields. Because yoga is a highly spiritual and individualized practice, one cannot convert all of the complex layers of experiences into hard facts. It is impossible to represent the essence of yoga in scientific data or through qualitative research alone. However, art, specifically dance, can be used to translate the idiosyncrasies of this practice into a medium which audiences can understand on a visceral level. So, my goal for this project is not to generalize one universal result of yoga, but to consider the implications of my personal practice on my dance career and represent my findings through dance performance.

The Role of Physicality Within a Yoga Practice

Literally translated, the word *yoga* means "to yoke," implying that the practice will unite the body and mind, bestowing the individual with a deeper understanding of his or her existence. Donna Farhi, a well-known yoga teacher, author, and former dancer, defines yoga as "a technology for arriving in this present moment." She goes on to say, "It is a way of remembering our true nature, which is essentially joyful and peaceful... It is a means of staying in intimate communication with the formative core matrix of yourself and those forces that serve to bind all living beings together" (5). Farhi's eloquent, complex descriptions may be confusing to many people in contemporary American society, because yoga is typically presented to Western audiences as solely a form of exercise. However, yoga is much more than yanking your legs behind your ears or suspending your torso on your elbows in a heated room. Unlike most forms of Western concert dance, the visual effect of the positions is less important than the internal experience of practicing the poses. The poses are considered a means to an end, an "embodied approach to spiritual practice" (Farhi 7), a process by which to attain a connection with one's "true nature" or with the divine. In fact, the poses themselves make up only one of many

components of yoga in the *ashtanga* (eight-limbed) system, according to Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* written in 400 CE: "The eight components of yoga are external discipline [*yama*], internal discipline [*niyama*], posture [*asana*], breath regulation [*pranayama*], withdrawal of the senses [*pratyahara*], concentration [*dharana*], meditative absorption [*dhyana*], and integration [*samadhi*]" (Cope 138). *Ahimsa,* the main focus of my project, actually falls under the category of the *yamas,* or external ethical disciplines.

Back in Patanjali's day, *asana* simply meant "seat for meditation" rather than the wide variety of shapes which modern yogis currently practice (Cope 194). Mark Singleton, author of *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*, clarifies the misconception that many current practitioners have about the historical origins of the yoga discipline:

> In spite of the immense popularity of postural yoga worldwide, there is little or no evidence that *asana* (excepting certain seated postures of meditation) has ever been the primary aspect of any Indian yoga practice tradition--including the medieval, body-oriented *hatha* yoga--in spite of the self-authenticating claims of many modern yoga schools (3).

Stephen Cope, author of *The Wisdom of Yoga*, offers a rather idealistic explanation for the physical virtuosity of the yoga *asana* practice, which has increased drastically in comparison to its humble origins:

> It is most likely that the multiplicity of postures was discovered in this way over and over again by meditating yogis. In order to investigate new aspects of the field of experience, their bodies spontaneously adopted new seats, new *asanas,* new steadily held poses which opened up new aspects of the field for exploration... Each new posture provided a new base, or seat, from which to explore, to witness (197).

Singleton, however, presents a more practical explanation. He claims that the assortment of yoga poses which are familiar to contemporary practitioners are actually "a result of the dialogical exchange between para-religious, modern body culture techniques developed in the West and the various discourses of 'modern' Hindu yoga" (5). According to Singleton, the discipline of European "esoteric gymnastics" played a large role in the evolution of virtuosity within the *asana* practice, especially as the British ruled in India during the nineteenth century.

So, the physical yoga that Westerners currently practice in studios, gyms, and classrooms today is not a direct heir from the teachings of Patanjali thousands of years ago, nor is it representative of the entire spiritual tradition by any means. However, the practice of *asana* as we know it today has still become a meaningful practice for countless numbers of people, so it should not be discredited entirely based on its hybridized history. While Patanjali certainly did not instruct the wide variety of physical poses that I learned in my teacher training program, the philosophical teachings within his *Yoga Sutras* can still be applicable to a modern yoga practice. Personally, I view these *sutras* as guidelines rather than commandments; they are a means to imbue my practice with a deeper intention, to reduce my negative energy and to connect my positive energy with that of others.

The Dancer's Dilemma

Yoga and dance share many similarities: obviously, they both incorporate movement, emphasizing specific alignment, balance, strength, and flexibility. Dance, like yoga, requires a keen use of focus and concentration. Both practices can become a spiritual experience for the practitioner, depending on the context. However, the main difference lies in the aesthetic priorities of Western concert dance movement in comparison to the more functional emphasis of movement in the yogic tradition. In a conventional dance rehearsal, the dancer must learn the

movement of the choreographer and adapt quickly to make this movement palatable within her body, whether or not certain movements are physically painful or damaging. In many cases, there is little consideration of the individual dancer's needs during the rehearsals and performances. Of course, this is not the case for all dance techniques, teachers, and choreographers, especially after many of the choreographers during the post-modern movement in the 1960's began to emphasize process over end-product (Reynolds, McCormick 396). During my time as a dance major at The Ohio State University, I have encountered several dance teachers whose teachings have been influenced by somatic disciplines and anatomical studies. I have found that these teachers generally tend to be more understanding of potential injuries or physical limitations. Yet, most dancers today, especially in their early training, will still encounter the overwhelming demand to push themselves to the point of physical strain at some point in their careers. As a result, these dancers may suffer injuries, or at least deal with the stress of repeatedly executing painful movements. Additionally, if the dancers struggle with certain movement and frequently compare themselves to others who execute it more easily, they may suffer from low self esteem. Therefore, many serious dancers enact an implicit attitude of violence toward their bodies during their training.

As Susan Foster explains in her article "Dancing Bodies," for most dancers, there is a large discrepancy between the "perceived body" which they inhabit and the "ideal body" outlined by the technique they are studying. "The dancer pursues a certain technique for reforming the body, and the body seems to conform to the instructions given," writes Foster. "Yet, suddenly, inexplicably, it diverges from expectations, reveals new dimensions, and mutely declares its unwillingness or inability to execute commands" (Foster 237). So, the dancer pursuing a career in that technical discipline lives in a perpetual state of frustration, always

working forcefully to achieve an unattainable ideal and criticizing herself for failing to do so.

However, many dancers and choreographers have also capitalized on their inability to conform to specific codified technique by developing new movement patterns as a result of their "failure" to achieve the established ones. The path to a career in contemporary dance today is not as straightforward as it was during the reign of the "Big Four": Graham, Humphrey, Holm, and Weidman (Reynolds, McCormick 319). Today's contemporary dancers are required to be increasingly versatile in order to find work, sometimes at the expense of their own intuition as performers: "The hired body, built at a great distance from the self, reduces it to a pragmatic merchant of movement proffering whatever look appeals at the moment" (Foster 256). This emphasis on acquiring a wide variety of physical training patterns can lead to a loss of the dancer's sense of identity and can also take a toll on her physical body. Prior to my past few years as a dance major, I had generally acknowledged this as a normal and unquestioned aspect of my training process. I simply accepted that I must force my body to do what was asked of me, regardless of whether it might cause me to injure myself in the long run. In many ways, I viewed my body as a piece of machinery, rather than an integral part of my "self."

Taking a Different Approach

When I began to practice yoga on a regular basis about seven years ago, I encountered a different attitude towards working with my body. The rhetoric in the yoga community is much different than in the majority of the dance world. Rather than pushing their physical limits to meet an end goal of performance, yoga practitioners are typically encouraged to work at their own paces to cultivate internal discipline and awareness, modifying the poses to suit their individual needs and resting as needed. While it is certainly possible to suffer an injury as a result of practicing yoga poses, if the practitioner is applying the *yamas* and *niyamas* to the

physical practice rather than letting the ego guide the movements, injuries are less likely to occur.

Admittedly, I came to yoga with the same goal as many Western practitioners: I wanted a good workout. I found that taking Hatha yoga classes was a great way to cross-train for dance because of its emphasis on toning, stretching, balancing, and breathing with the movement. At first, I struggled with the feedback I received from my yoga teachers. They often advised me to exert less effort, or to take a less advanced modification of a pose. This was completely contrary to the approach of my ballet teachers at the time, who were usually demanding that I must work harder and lift my leg higher to achieve technical competency. However, as I began to deepen my personal yoga practice, yoga classes became a welcome relief from the stressful confines of the dance studio. I began to embrace the notion that I did not always need to work at the highest possible level to gain something from the physical practice.

I became especially interested in the yogic concept of *ahimsa,* one of the five *yamas,* or ethical guidelines, outlined by Patanjali. *Ahimsa* translates literally to nonviolence, or non-harming. Farhi extrapolates on the less obvious meaning of *ahimsa:*

> "This precept goes far and beyond the limited penal sense of not killing others. First and foremost we have to learn how to be nonviolent with ourselves... In truth, few of us would dare to be as unkind to others as we are to ourselves. This can be as subtle as the criticism of our body when we look in the mirror in the morning, or when we denigrate our best efforts. Any thought, word, or action that prevents us (or someone else) from growing and living freely is one that is harmful" (Farhi 9).

In addition to practicing this virtue in their daily lives, yogis strive to practice their poses with the attitude of *ahimsa,* avoiding postures or movements which will not serve their bodies in a

productive way. To further articulate the concept of *ahimsa* as it resonates with me on a personal level, I reference one of my favorite excerpts of yogic literature, from *The Radiance Sutras*, translated by Lorin Roche:

> Forget all of your ideas about the body--
> It's this way or it's that way.
>
> Just be with any area of it,
> This present body
> As permeated by limitless space,
> Drenched in freedom (Roche 23).

I love this sutra because I think it summarizes the concept of *ahimsa* as it relates to my mental relationship with my physical body, without even needing to use the textbook definition of "nonviolence." I began to think about a way to incorporate the concept of *ahimsa* into dance training, without sacrificing the caliber of the performance. Before I could apply this idea in a meaningful way, I felt that I needed to deepen my knowledge of the entire practice of yoga.

METHODOLOGY

Learning to Teach

For my initial research, I completed a 200 hour teacher certification in Hatha yoga through Yoga on High in Columbus, Ohio. In addition to practicing *asanas,* or poses, I studied yogic philosophy, pedagogy, *pranayama* (breathing techniques), *dhyana* (meditation), anatomy, and kinesiology. I learned how to effectively demonstrate poses and verbally articulate the alignment principles with clarity. I assisted experienced teachers on a weekly basis and observed their methodology. I learned how to modify poses with the use of props and physical adjustments

to accommodate students with limited ranges of movement, as well as to address populations with specific needs. Most importantly, my teachers at Yoga on High stressed the importance of being aware of the physical and emotional limitations of my students. Rather than regurgitating a standard curriculum, I learned to tailor my instructions to help my students practice at the appropriate level.

Throughout this teacher training program, I felt that there was a large emphasis on delivering the material with *ahimsa,* an approach which differed greatly from many of the dance courses that I was taking at the time (although I have encountered several contemporary dance teachers who incorporate a similar intent of non-harming into their teaching). As I practiced teaching others in this way, I also learned how to take better care of my own body. Over time, I increased my bodily awareness and began to define my own physical boundaries of pain versus pleasure. Like every other dancer in the world, I am still tempted to criticize my body for failing to meet the standards set by other, more virtuosic dancers. However, yoga has helped me to become more appreciative of my body's capabilities.

Collaborative Creative Process

After the completion of my teacher training program, I asked local choreographer and yoga instructor Colleen Leonardi to choreograph an individualized solo for me stemming from my idea of dancing with *ahimsa,* or nonviolence. One of the reasons I chose to work with Colleen is that we have similar training backgrounds: she received her MFA in Dance from The Ohio State University Department of Dance, concentrating on choreography and dance writing, and she also completed her yoga teacher certification from Yoga on High. While Colleen formally took on the role of the choreographer by structuring the dance and directing rehearsals, and I assumed the role of the performer, we worked collaboratively to generate much of the

movement. Occasionally, Colleen would teach me set phrases of material, but more often, we utilized improvisational exercises to build movement sequences.

Developing an Individualized Movement Vocabulary

One of the tactics we used to develop movement material was self exploration outside of the studio. Colleen would give me writing assignments such as a brief autobiography and an extensive description of things that inspired me. My list included other dancers, artists, writers, musicians, favorite teachers, and family members, but it also included more subtle observations from my daily life. Many of my inspirations were descriptions of sensory experiences. When we came back to rehearsal, we would use my writing to inform the creation of new movement. I would improvise as she read my words aloud, not trying to depict the narrative literally, but just to absorb the language as I moved. This strategy instilled much of the movement vocabulary with a sense of personal identity for me.

The eclectic movement vocabulary we utilized was drawn from a variety of sources, including traditional steps from Western concert dance, yoga *asanas* (poses), pedestrian movements, and invented *mudras,* or meaningful gestures. When we incorporated yoga poses into the choreography, we used them in a dynamic way so that they transitioned coherently into the next movement. I found that many of the poses were already ingrained into my movement patterns; I started making the shapes as I was dancing without intending to. As a warm-up and a way to generate movement, Colleen would direct me in an improvisation on differing energy levels, starting at one and working up to ten, reversing, then alternating between opposite ends of the spectrum. During this exercise, I used the quality of my breath to monitor how much I was exerting myself, just as I would in a yoga practice. Although I wanted the piece to reflect the serenity of an *asana* practice at some points, I did not want to rely solely on the tone created by

yoga poses and meditation. While I sought to find movement that felt intuitive to me on a functional level, I have never truly felt connected to most movement styles that are asserted as being "natural." So, rather than relying on other people's aesthetics to derive movement free from excess strain, Colleen and I created movement that would appeal to my personal physical strengths.

Embracing the Complicated Aspects of My Yogic Identity

As a yoga teacher, I often feel that I have to live up to a certain expectation of a calm, peaceful, "Zen" personality. At times, I have worried that I am too confused, cynical, and imperfect as a person to translate yogic teachings to others without being considered a complete hypocrite. Just as the dancer develops the "ideal body" in her mind, it is tempting to apply an ideal persona to the face of a yoga teacher. However, the historical origins of yoga are quite complicated, and they do not always live up to the common conception of yoga as an entirely pure practice stemming directly from a singular ancient source. For example, many of the first Indian practitioners of physical yoga poses were bawdy street performers, executing contorted positions and superhuman feats for money. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a seventeenth century European observer, wrote that the fakir-yogis in India "assume positions altogether contrary to the natural attitude of the human body" (Singleton 38). Francois Bernier, a French writer of roughly the same time period, noted that some groups of ascetic yogins performed postures which were "so difficult and painful that they could not be imitated by our tumblers" (Singleton 37). It was not until the the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that physical health and wellness became the dominating rhetoric in the discipline of yoga. During this time, there was a widespread reform of the yogic discipline during led to a more scientific based approach rather than the previous amalgamation of mysticism and superhuman feats.

While the philosophical and spiritual origins of yoga should not be overlooked, the implications of the bizarre practices in the early development of *asana* practice should not be entirely disregarded either. Despite the current trend in marketing yoga as a "natural" practice, there is an inherent grotesque element in the poses themselves, as practitioners expand the pedestrian limitations of the human body. Although the practices of these *yogins* in the seventeenth century do not seem to align with the writings of Patanjali or with the contemporary rhetoric that I have experienced in my training, I wanted to explore the more unorthodox aspects of this convoluted tradition.

Part of my struggle with this dance-making process was negotiating the overarching goal of being gentle towards my body with my own inexplicable attraction to violence and extremism in performance. When Colleen and I were playing with movement for this piece, I expressed my affinity for absurd movement that is occasionally shocking or aggressive. I referenced illustrations from dance history books which depicted the bodies of "grotesque dancers" from the Baroque era, and mentioned what I had read about the original *yogins* performing extreme bodily mutations in the streets. Somehow, I felt more deeply connected to these images than to the stereotypical images of ancient yogis seated quietly in lotus pose. After all, yoga does calm my mind and quiet my demeanor at times, but it also awakens a powerful, inexplicable force within me. So, Colleen and I began experimenting in rehearsal with a more grotesque, contorted, and somewhat aggressive aesthetic (while still trying to avoid movements which would actually be harmful) in addition to the free flow, smooth transitions, and calm stability of the movement which would be perceived as more "natural" (Foster 245). This resulted in the juxtaposition of intense activity (such as a series of twisting turns or an improvised sequence of desperately grasping arm movements) with moments of quiet stillness (such as resting in *balasana,* child's

pose, or reclining on my back). By embracing aspects of my identity which fell outside the boundaries of a conventional yoga practitioner and employing a range of differing energetic levels, we were able to cultivate dynamic and qualitative contrast within the choreography.

Relationship to Music

We experimented with different sound scores, from spoken poetry to a melancholy Tom Waits song, ultimately deciding on a Sanskrit chant which Colleen suggested. The final sound choice ultimately served the dance by invoking a meditative quality in the movement. The words of this chant are known as a *mantra*: "a word, sound or phrase which elevates or modifies consciousness through its meaning, sound, rhythm, tone and reflexology of the tongue against the palate of the mouth" (Yogini). The song begins with a gentle gong, and Colleen layered the sound of birds chirping onto the beginning of the track. These emotionally laden sounds added a sense of awakening to initiate the ritual of the movement practice. The singer Deva Premal repeats the words "*Om Gum Ganapatayei Namaha*" over and over again. This Sanskrit phrase has various interpretations, but a basic translation is "Om and salutations to the remover of obstacles for which Gum is the seed" (Ashley-Farrand). Essentially, the singer is invoking the aid of the Hindu deity Ganesh, a figure with the head of an elephant who is traditionally viewed as the "Remover of Obstacles." While I did not literally interpret my dancing to this music as an offering to a Hindu god, the meaning of the lyrics still paralleled the intention of the choreography. In a way, I was seeking to remove the physical and mental obstacles which prevented me from fully enjoying my dance practice. Towards the end of the track, Colleen added the sounds of a rain storm. As I performed gathering arm gestures while pivoting around a central point, I imagined cool rain washing over my body. In this way, the sound score which Colleen created added a feeling of sensual indulgence to the movement.We did not set specific

counts to the music, which allowed me to experiment with my rhythmic relationship to the score. Playing with the timing became an ongoing challenge as I strived to remain within the overall structure of the sequence and retain the intended quality of each movement.

Editing without Clinging

Due to our main goal of creating a dance with *ahimsa*, we naturally had to apply the practice of *aparigraha,* translated as non-attachment or "freedom from wanting" (Cope 164), as well. If certain movements that we initially created ended up being unnecessarily painful or simply were not serving the purpose of the choreography, we had to let them go. While my studies of anatomy greatly informed what I determined as a productive movement to execute, the internal awareness that I cultivated through my yoga practice was crucial to the discerning process. While working to create non-harming movement, Colleen and I still maintained a certain degree of rigor in the rehearsal process. In a yogic context, this sense of rigor is referred to as *tapas,* translated as austerity, or "the disciplined use of our energy" (Farhi 13). Editing with *aparigraha* did not mean that the end result of the process would be unimportant, since we had to apply *tapas* to our work as well. Because dances that lack a certain level of physicality are thoroughly boring to me as an audience member, I did not want to default to making a purely gestural dance, or a lackluster assemblage of walking and running. Those options would have been a much too obvious answer to the prompt at hand. While we incorporated some of these tidbits inherited from the early post-modern experiments into the vocabulary, such as pacing back and forth, crawling, gesturing, and fixing my hair, the dance was not about making movement that anyone could do. On the contrary, it was meant to address my identity as both a dancer and a yogi. I definitely cared about performing a piece that would be engaging for the audience on either an aesthetic or emotional level. At some points I had to let go of my own self-

judgments and trust that the movement which felt enjoyable and meaningful to me would have a similar effect on the viewers.

Balancing the Internal with the External

As we continued to develop the dance, we worked to develop a clear *drishti,* or focal point, as I executed each specific movement. Yogis use *drishti* to help them sustain difficult balancing poses by concentrating their energy onto a single object. During rehearsal, Colleen would often lead focal warm-ups before delving into a full run of the piece. For example, we used the exercise she deemed "Portrait, Still Life, Landscape" to expand my focus from a purely internal one to a perception that mingled an awareness of external and internal stimuli. I learned to absorb information from my environment while simultaneously acknowledging physical sensations and emotional responses as I was dancing. Through this application of focus, we utilized another two of the eight limbs of yoga, *pratyahara* and *dharana*. Although *pratyahara* is commonly defined as "withdrawal of the senses," Judith Lasater clarifies that this withdrawal does not mean that one should retreat completely into an introspective focus:

> You are withdrawing from the external world without completely losing contact with it... Most of us know this state; when you're in it, you feel like you're at the bottom of a well. You register the sounds that occur around you, for example, but these sounds do not create disturbance in your body or mind. It is this state of nonreaction that I am calling *pratyahara*. You still register input from your sense organs, but you don't react to that input. There seems to be a space between the sensory stimulus and your response. Or, in everyday language, you are in the world but not of it (Lasater).

When one can attend to the sensory experiences without attaching to them, it becomes easier to practice *dharana*, or extended concentration. Farhi defines *dharana* as "focusing attention and

cultivating inner perceptual awareness" (7). Combining these two practices, possibly alongside *pranayama* and/or *asana*, enables *dhyana*, meditation. As I danced this solo, Colleen encourage me to notice my surroundings, but I also felt myself sinking into my own inner world of sorts, especially during the performances. Throughout our rehearsal process, Colleen emphasized the importance of maintaining this dance as a regular practice in order to truly embody it for performance.

Performance as Process

I performed this solo, entitled "Thoughts in My Lungs," three times in the winter concert presented by The Ohio State University Department of Dance at the BalletMet Performance Space. Prior to the performances, I managed my anxiety by attending to the quality of my breath, focusing on steady, even inhalations and exhalations. The performances went by very quickly, and afterward, I found myself eager to perform the dance again, or to make it longer. Though initially apprehensive about presenting a highly personal dance in front of a public audience, I found that the performances actually deepened the experience of the movement for me. Rather than becoming an ultimatum of success or failure, the performances became a natural extension of the creative process. As I was performing, I felt empowered by the movement. While the choreography still challenged me physically and mentally, I also felt a sense of ease and comfort executing this dance that had grown from a mindful and ethical approach. I was able to perform to my fullest extent without experiencing excess bodily pain. After the performances, Colleen and I received a lot of positive feedback from audience members. Several people approached me and observed, in varying ways, that the dance had personal meaning for me. Others noted that it looked like it felt natural or enjoyable for me to move in that way.

CONCLUSIONS

By incorporating yogic concepts such as *ahimsa* (nonviolence), into the dance-making process, I was able to perform a solo that was personally meaningful and physically challenging to me, while remaining attentive to my body's needs. From this process, I have determined that, first of all, an open and dialogic relationship between choreographer and performer is crucial to the goal of dancing with *ahimsa.* During our rehearsal process, Colleen's willingness to be conscious of my individual needs helped me to be more receptive of her choreographic intentions. Secondly, the practice of embodying *ahimsa* is linked to an understanding of the dancer as a whole person, rather than just a mover. If the choreographer understands what the dancer enjoys and finds meaningful in her life, it will be easier to create movement for her body that appears easeful and interesting. Additionally, because each dancer is unique, the guidelines for determining how to move with *ahimsa* must change for each person. Since each dancer has unique strengths and weaknesses stemming from his or her training background, physical structure, and personal life, it is important to take these aspects of that person into account before creating movement on him or her. Lastly, in order to apply yogic virtues to the creation of the dance, both the dancers and the choreographer may need to sacrifice certain aesthetic expectations in order to achieve the desired embodiment of the ethical principles in question.

Working with such an approach has the potential to produce rich, unexpected movement material that is worthwhile for both the performer and the viewer. By utilizing a similar process, other dancers may find a deeper level of engagement with their work while developing a sense of autonomy in their movement practices. While the concept of dancing with *ahimsa* would be more difficult to apply to a large group work rather than an individualized solo, I am confident that this level of sensitivity would be beneficial in any choreographic endeavor. While I acknowledge that it will not always be possible to approach every performing opportunity in the

same way that I approached this project, I will definitely use the knowledge gained from this process as I continue to perform, teach, and create.

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